

The Lament of the Virgin in Byzantine Literature and Modern Greek Folk-Song

MARGARET ALEXIOU

The lament of the Virgin at the Crucifixion of Christ is a theme which can be traced throughout Greek tradition, from at least the sixth century to the present day. It is also found in a wide variety of sources: in the hymns and liturgy of the Orthodox Church, in prose homilies, in learned and vernacular poetry, and in modern folk songs from most areas of the Greek-speaking world. We therefore have an opportunity to examine how different writers and poets responded to a single theme over a period of nearly fifteen centuries.

E. de Martino has argued that the figure of the Mater Dolorosa was introduced by the Church fathers to absorb and eradicate pagan elements in lamentation, deriving the western vernacular *planctus Mariae* from Latin learned tradition, and characterizing them as indicative of the decline of ancient pagan lamentation, since the new, Christian ethos eventually predominated.¹ This view of the general evolution of our theme is hardly supported by the Greek evidence. First, the early Church fathers who attack pagan lamentation as un-Christian do not themselves develop the theme of Mary's grief; on the contrary, her fortitude is upheld as exemplary.² Secondly, from the earliest material in Greek, the human aspects of the situation are no less important than the theological or moral concerns.

1. E. de Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria* (Turin, 1958), pp. 334–44.

2. See Basil, *De gratiarum actione*, MPG, XXXI, 232.

Nor is it possible to draw a sharp distinction between the types of material: from the sixth century onwards, the laments show a remarkable degree of interaction of religious, learned, and popular elements, the most striking differences being in language, style, and tone rather than in content. Finally, the Virgin's lament should be seen within the context of a wider tradition of laments on biblical themes, such as the laments of Abraham and Sarah for Isaac,³ the lament of Jephtha's daughter,⁴ and the laments on Adam's fall from Paradise.⁵ In the best examples of these laments, the infusion of popular elements into religious themes provides a new dimension; hence the relationship between learned, religious, and popular literature is dynamic, not static, and hardly indicative of decline.

My method will be to examine the most important examples of the Virgin's lament, indicating the common features as well as individuality of treatment, and to enquire to what extent they can be said to draw on a common tradition. A strictly chronological order is precluded by the difficulty of dating much of the material. I shall therefore discuss texts in the following six parts: Romanos and Byzantine hymns, the *Epitaphios Threnos*, the homilies and the learned drama *Christos Paschon*, the apocryphal *Acta Pilati*, the vernacular *threnoi* of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, and the modern folk songs.

I. *Romanos and Byzantine hymns*

The story of the Crucifixion as told in the Gospels contains no reference to Mary's lament. St. John mentions Mary, her sister Mary, wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene as 'standing by the Cross', but not a lament.⁶ St. Luke refers to a crowd of

3. A lament for Isaac, which Abraham might have uttered if he had not been a just man, is mentioned in several early homilies. See Gregory of Nyssa, *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti*, MPG, XLVI, 553–76, and S. I. Mercati, *S. Ephraem Syri Opera* (Rome, 1915), I, p. 4, for a complete list of references. Gregory's *planctus* is closely based on a poetic homily which is attributed to Ephraem, Mercati, op. cit., pp. 43–83, but probably of Greek and not of Syriac origin. For Romanos' *kontakion* on the same theme, see Romanos le Mélode, *Hymnes*, I, pp. 138–65, ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons (Sources Chrétiennes, 99, Paris, 1964).

4. See M. Alexiou and P. Dronke, 'The lament of Jephtha's daughter: themes, traditions, originality', *Studi Medievali*, XII, 2 (1971), 819–63.

5. Texts are listed by H.-G. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (Munich, 1971), pp. 189–90.

6. John 19:25–7, cf. 20:11.

people, including women, who followed Jesus and lamented him, but not to Mary.⁷ But from the very beginning, Byzantine tradition focuses attention on the human figure of Mary mourning her son. The earliest example which can be dated with certainty is Romanos' *kontakion*, *Mary at the Cross* (sixth century).⁸ Romanos' originality lies in his choice of dramatic setting and in his use of dialogue: Mary does not mourn Christ dying or dead on the Cross, but laments and challenges his decision on the way to Calvary. Her reactions to his justification of the Crucifixion are those of an ordinary mother, relevant and at the same time disturbing, since the tension between her rejection and acceptance of the Crucifixion is sustained until the end.

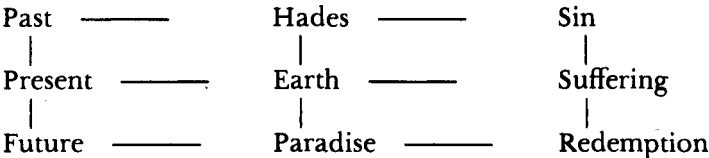
Structurally and poetically, this hymn is one of the most exciting achievements of Byzantine literature. After the *koukoulion*, there follow seventeen *troparia* which form the acrostic *ΤΟΥ ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ*, and each *troparion* is concluded with the refrain *ὁ υἱὸς καὶ θεὸς μου*. The hymn opens with an invocation in the proem to all people to join in praise of Mary, and concludes with a reaffirmation of praise in the light of suffering. The intervening *troparia* take the form of a dialogue, in which Mary's laments are carefully balanced with Christ's replies. Her first lament extends over three verses: she asks where Christ is going, why he is hastening to his death, and implores him not to pass her by in silence (present). She never expected to see him in such straits, nor that those who only yesterday had strewn his path with palms would today be clamouring for his death, and she recalls with bitterness the promises of the apostles never to desert him (past). She concludes with a note of anger—even irony—that he dies alone and unjustly because he wishes to save mankind (present). In the next three verses, Christ gently asks Mary not to be carried away by emotion, like other women, reminding her of her unique position in the church (present). He emphasizes that the Crucifixion is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies (past), and renews his appeal to her not to lament, but to acclaim his decision (present). She protests that she can silence her emotion, but not her reason: his past miracles have shown that he can heal

7. Luke 22:27–8.

8. Romanos, *Hymnes*, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, IV, pp. 158–87.

the lame, the paralysed, and the blind, even raise the dead, without suffering death himself, so why need he die now to save mankind? *Μὴ ἐπέτρου πρὸς σφαγὴν, μὴ φιλήσης θάνατον, ὁ υἱὸς καὶ θεὸς μου*, she cries out, almost accusingly. In reply to these two verses, Christ tells her, with a hint of impatience, that she has understood nothing of his teaching, pointing to the voluntary sickness of Adam and Eve in the past, and to their present misery in Hades, as proof of the necessity of man's healing and redemption through his Crucifixion (also two verses). Then the ground changes, as Mary neither accepts nor rejects his decision, but expresses, in a single verse of short, anxious questions, her fear that she will not see him again (future). In the three following verses, Christ assures her that she will be the first to see him when he rises on the third day, and that then she will cry out in joy that he has saved her forebears. By means of a complex medical metaphor of himself as physician, he describes the healing and redemption which the Cross will bring to all (future). The dialogue ends with a brief exchange, in which Mary's grief for the present is tempered with Christ's hope for the future.

Although carefully structured, this hymn is not static. There is a probing and exploration of human emotion, which is brought into conflict with the theological standpoint, but ultimately reconciled with it. This conflict, expressed through the dialogue and also by the refrain, gives dynamic rather than formalistic meaning to the interweaving of the three corresponding planes of time, place, and situation:



As in the best of Romanos' work, form is closely integrated with content.⁹

The question of Romanos' originality is complex, and cannot be determined simply by tracing the sources of isolated themes and phrases. A possible precedent, which Romanos may have

9. For a more detailed analysis of the structure of this hymn, see M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 142–5.

known and used, exists in a poetic homily attributed to Ephraem but surviving only in a Latin translation. In addition to the recurrent phrase *Mi fili et mi deus*, which is the same as Romanos' refrain, the two works share certain similarities of expression and detail.¹⁰ But whatever Romanos' debt to this homily, the influence of his *kontakion* on subsequent Byzantine tradition is indicated by the high proportion of motifs, themes, and formulae which recur not only in the hymns and liturgy, but also in the homilies and in some of the later vernacular *threnoi*.¹¹

10. Ephraem, *Lamentationes gloriosissimae Virginis super Passione Domini*, ed. J. S. Assemani, *S. Ephraem Syri, Opera Omnia* (Venice, 1755), I, pp. 568–9. The passages common to Romanos are as follows: . . . Salvatoremq[ue] in ea (sc. Cruce) suspensum cernens, . . . magno cum planctu, lamentisque dolore plenis exclamabat, dicens: Mi fili dulcissime, fili mi carissime, quo modo Crucem istam portas? Mi fili, et mi Deus . . . Mortuos ad vitam revocasti, paralyticum consolidasti, . . . Lazarum a monumento suscitasti foetidum, . . . lumen meum obscuratum est. The fact remains, however, that this text has much more in common with the later hymns than with Romanos. According to Dr. S. P. Brock, for whose advice on this and the *Abraham and Isaac* homily I am greatly indebted, it is unlikely that his piece is genuine Ephraem, nor can we assume that a Syriac original ever existed.

11. Romanos, *proem* 2: αὐτὸν γὰρ κατεῖδε Μαρία ἐπὶ ξύλου καὶ ἔλεγεν; cf. *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*, V, Transcripta 3–5, ed. C. Hoeg, H. Tillyard and E. Wellesz (Copenhagen, 1936), [hereafter cited as *MMB*], p. 186, no. 16: ἡ Θεοτόκος ἐπὶ σταυροῦ καθορῶσά σε γυνὸν κρεμάμενον, *ibid.* nos. 3, 18, 23, 27, 29; Josephus Hymnographus, *MPG*, CV, 1345D and 1349D; *Θρήνος τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου εἰς τὴν Σταύρωσιν τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ*, ed. M. Manousakas, *Ἑλληνικά ποιήματα γιὰ σταύρωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Mélanges offerts à O. et M. Merlier* (Paris, 1956), II, p. 65, l. 2: καὶ τὸν Σωτῆρα βλέπουσα κρεμάμενον ἐν ξύλῳ.

—Romanos, refrain: ὁ υἱὸς καὶ θεὸς μου; cf. *MMB*, nos. 4, 18, 29; *Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, passim*.

—Romanos α' 4–5: Ποῦ πορεύῃ, τέκνον; Τίνος χάριν τὸν ταχὺν δρόμον τελείεις;; cf. *Christos Paschon*, 454–6, ed. J. Brambs (Leipzig, 1885): Πῇ πῇ πορεύῃ, τέκνον; ὡς ἀπωλόμην· ἐκκινῇ τίνος τὸν ταχὺν τελεῖς δρόμον; *MMB*, no. 27: Οἱμοὶ ποῦ πορεύῃ, τέκνον ἐμόν;

—Romanos α' 8: Δός μοι λόγον, Λόγε, μὴ σιγῶν παρέλθῃς με; cf. *Christos Paschon*, 459–60; *MMB*, no. 4; *Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου*, l. 70: Δός μοι λόγον, παμφίλτατε, ἀπὸ τῶν σῶν χειλέων.

—Romanos β' 1: Οὐκ ἠλπίζον, τέκνον, ἐν τούτοις ἰδεῖν σε; cf. *MMB*, no. 26: οὐκ ἠλπίζον ἐν τούτοις κατιδέειν σε, ὦ Υἱέ.

—Romanos γ' 2–9: οὐ συνέχεται σοὶ Πέτρος . . . ἐλπιδέ σε Θώμας . . . οἱ ἄλλοι δὲ πάλιν, οἱ οἰκεῖοι καὶ υἱοί . . . ποῦ εἰσιν ἄρτι;; cf. *MMB*, no. 16; *Germanus Patr., In dominici corporis sepulturam*, *MPG*, XCVIII, 276A: Οἱ φίλοι καὶ οἱ πλησίον, ποῦ; Ποῦ εἰσιν οἱ χθῆς ὑπεραποθήσκειν καυχώμενοι; *Acta Pilati*, ed. C. Tischendorf,

Most important of all, the situation in the homily, as in some of the later Byzantine laments, is less dynamic: Mary laments Christ dead on the Cross, hence there can be no dialogue and no conflict. The extensive dialogue between Mary and Christ, in which the details are all part of his whole conception of the conflict, is therefore exclusive to Romanos.

After Romanos, Mary's lamentation is taken up in a series of ninth-century *troparia*, attributed to Leo VI,¹² and in the work of Joseph the Hymn-writer (†c. 886).¹³ These hymns are known as *Stavrotheotokia*, and on the whole they show a close dependence on Romanos and few new ideas. They are shorter and less dramatic than Romanos' *kontakion*, the transition from lamentation to acclamation being too sudden to be convincing. In the following example, Mary protests, as in Romanos, at the failure of Peter and the disciples to stand by Christ, and then immediately asks him to rise again so that she can be glorified with him:

Ἀρχίφωτον ἀπαύγασμα τῆς πατρικῆς σου δόξης, Ἥλιε ἄδυτε, ἡ Θεοτόκος ἐπὶ σταυροῦ καθορῶσά σε γυνὸν κρεμάμενον ὡς κατάκριτον ἐλεεινῶς ἀπωδύρετο:—Οἱμοι τέκνον ἐμόν, οἱμοι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, πῶς πέπονθας; ῥομφαία γὰρ δεινὴ με διακόπτει, τὰ σπλάγχνα καὶ τὴν καρδίαν τιτρώσκει, ὀρῶσαν σε νεκρὸν ἄπνουν ἄλαλον τὴν τῶν ἀπάντων ζωὴν. Οἱμοι πῶς σὲ καλύψει λίθος; πῶς δὲ καὶ τάφος δέξεται τὴν τῆς σοφίας πηγὴν; Ποῦ Πέτρος δν ἠγάπησας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ μαθηταὶ σου; Μόνος, Υἱέ μου, θνήσκεις πάντως ὡς ἡβουλήθης. Ἀλλὰ μέγαλυνόν με τὴν τεκοῦσαν σε, Λόγε, τῇ ἀναστάσει σου, καὶ τοὺς ὑμνοῦντάς σου τὰ πάθη σῶσον ἡμᾶς ὡς εὐσπλαγχνος.

(*Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*, pp. 186–7 no. 16).

Evangelia Apocrypha (Leipzig, 1853), p. 285: Ποῦ οἱ μαθηταὶ σου οἱ καυχώμενοι συναποθνήσκουν σοι; Ποῦ οἱ παρὰ σοῦ ἰαθέντες;

Other common themes include the ingratitude of the Jews, the appeal to all to join in praise and lamentation, the salvation of Adam (hymns), Mary's reference to Christ's miracles, Christ's appeal to Mary not to weep, and the confusion of the elements at the Crucifixion. The fact that the closest verbal similarities occur in strophes α'-γ' suggests that these were the most familiar. For the tendency of the later *kontakaria* to include only the proem and the first few strophes, see Romanos, *Hymnes*, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, I, pp. 23–32.

12. *MMB*, V, pp. 165–206, nos. 1–29. The hymns are not now in use.

13. *MPG*, CV, 1345–49.

There is some brilliance and pathos in the imagery, and in the series of antitheses and rhetorical questions,¹⁴ but the overall effect is effusive. In one hymn, which takes the form of a brief dialogue between Mary and the dying Christ, there are some close verbal echoes of Romanos, but Christ's plea to Mary not to weep lacks force, since she has posed no challenge:

—Παῦσαι ὀδυρομένη, μήτηρ ἐμή, θεασαμένη με ἐν ξύλῳ
προσηλούμενον ὑπὸ τῶν παρανόμων· δέδωκα γὰρ ἑμαυτὸν
ἐκουσίως παθεῖν. Ἄνεξ τῶν δακρύων.

—Τίς θεωρῶν τέκνον ἐν ἀδικίᾳ οὐ συνέχεται; ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι
καθὼς εἶπας ἐκ τοῦ τάφου, Υἱέ, ἐν ᾧ χαίρουσα κράζω
παντοδύναμε καὶ ἀκατάληπτε, Κύριε, δόξα σοι.

(Ibid., p. 180 no. 11).

In general, we may detect in these hymns a tendency to isolate Mary's grief from the wider and deeper context of the Crucifixion, and a concentration upon sentiment which renders it pathetic—almost self-centred—rather than tragic. Mary lacks the individuality and profound humanity of Romanos' character. But, although inferior from a literary point of view, hymns such as these seem to have occupied an important place in Byzantine tradition. Of the themes and phrases which can be traced in later tradition back to Romanos, by far the greatest number occurs in the hymns; and of the themes and phrases occurring in the hymns but not in Romanos, many are found in the liturgy, the homilies, and in the vernacular *threnoi*, while others occur in one or another but not in all three. In other words, the hymns contain a high proportion of common elements.¹⁵

14. The type of question 'How shall the tomb contain you?' occurs in later laments, and also in the folk songs lamenting the death of Digenis. Cf. Germ. Patr., MPG, XCVIII, 269C: 'Ο μετρῶν τὸν οὐρανὸν σπιθαμῇ, πῶς ὑπέρχη τρίπηχυν τάφον;'; Ἄσμα τῆς Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς, A. Sakellarios, Τὰ Κυπριακά (Athens, 1890–1), II, p. 85, l. 23: ὁ οὐρανὸς 'ἐν σὲ χωρεῖ κι ἡ γῆ' ἐν σὲ βαστάχει; N. Politis, Ἀκριτικά ἄσματα: ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ, Λαογραφία, I (1909) 253, ll. 1–5: 'Ο Διγενὴς ψυχομαχεῖ κι ἡ γῆ τόνε τρομάσσει . . . / κι ἡ πλάκα τὸν ἀνατριχιά πῶς θὰ τόνε σκεπάσει, / πῶς θὰ σκεπάσει τὸν αὐτὸ τῇ γῆς τὸν ἀντρεωμένο;

15.—Joseph Hymn., MPG, CV, 1345D: Παρισταμένη τῷ σταυρῷ σου, Κύριε; cf. MMB, nos. 2, 6, 10, 20, 26; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, l. 1: Παρισταμένη τῷ σταυρῷ ἡ [footnote continued overleaf]

πάνανγος Παρθένος. Ephraem, p. 568: Stans juxta crucem pura et immaculata virgo. This line, based on John 19.25, is found in many Latin hymns and *planctus*. See F. Mone, *Lateinische Hymnen* (Freiburg, 1854), II, pp. 147–54.

—MMB, no. 4: Οἶμοι οὐ φέρω ὄραν σε ἀδίκως ἐπὶ ζύλῳ; cf. nos. 6, 29, 23: πῶς ἑκὼν ὑπομένεις ἐπονείδιστον θάνατον; Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1049A, 1348B; *Acta Pilati*, p. 283: πῶς ὑπομενῶ θεωρεῖν σε τοιαῦτα πάσχοντα; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, l. 8: πῶς ὑπομένεις τὸν σταυρόν; Sakellarios, l. 25: καὶ πῶς ἐκαταδέχτηκες κι εἰς τὸν σταυρὸν ἀνέβης;

—MMB, no. 6: Οἶμοι γλυκύτατε Υἱέ μου, cf. nos. 10, 16, 23, 29; *Acta Pilati*, p. 283 (MS. C): Οἶμοι, οἶμοι! γλυκύτατε υἱέ; cf. Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, l. 7; Sakellarios, l. 22: Ὁ τέκνον μου γλυκύτατον καὶ φῶς τῶν ἀματιῶν μου.

—Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1349B: Ῥομφαία τὴν σὴν διήλθε καρδίαν, καθωρώσης σὸν Υἱόν, ἀχραντε Κόρη, ἡλούμενον ἐν ζύλῳ, καὶ πάθη φέροντα; cf. MMB, nos. 20, 16: Ῥομφαία γὰρ δεινὴ μὲ διακόπτει τὰ σπλάγχνα, Germanus Patr., MPG, XCVIII, 276C: ἀφίκετο ἡ Ῥομφαία· διαβαίνει μου τὴν καρδίαν· σπαράττει τὰ σπλάγχνα; *Acta Pilati*, p. 292: αὕτη ἐστὶν Ῥομφαία ἥτις νῦν κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν μου διέρχεται; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, ll. 59–61: Ὡ Συμεὼν πανθαύμαστε, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡ Ῥομφαία! ἦν μοι ποτὲ προέφησας ἔχειν εἰς τὴν καρδίαν./ Ἴδοὺ Ῥομφαία καὶ σφαγὴ, υἱέ μου καὶ θεέ μου; Ephraem, p. 568: O Simeon admirande, ecce jam gladius, quo cor meum trajiciendum praedixisti. Ecce gladium: ecce vulnus. . . Mors tua cor meum subiit: disrupta sunt mea viscera. See Luke 2. 35.

—Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1345D: Τὸν ἑαυτῆς μόσχον ἡ ἀμειπτος δάμαλις κατιδοῦσα ζύλῳ ἀναρτώμενον, Τέκνον, ἐβόα ἀλαλαγμῷ; cf. *Epitaph. Threnos*, III, 27: Ἡ δάμαλις τὸν μόσχον ἐν ζύλῳ κρεμασθέντα ἠλάλαξεν ὀρώσα.

—Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1345D: ὠδύνας ἀποφυγοῦσα τῷ τόκῳ σου, νῦν ὀδυνήρως κατατρύχομαι; cf. MMB, nos. 9, 4: πῶς ὀδύνας φυγοῦσα ἐν ἀχράντῳ σου τόκῳ νῦν ὀδύνων οὐκ ἀπήλλαγμαί; Georg. Nicomed., MPG, C, 1472D: Νῦν σου μόνη τῶν τιμίων ὑπερπάσχω παθῶν· μόνη σφοδροτέρας σου τὰς ὀδύνας ἐν τῇ ἐμῇ εἰσέρχομαι καρδίᾳ.

—Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1348A: Κύριόν σε τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὠραῖον ἀπεκύησα κάλλι ἐπὲρ υἱοῦς ἀνθρώπων; cf. Symeon Metaphrastes, *S. Mariae Planctus*, MPG, CXIV, 209A: καὶ νῦν ἀμορφος κείσαι, ὁ ὠραῖος παρὰ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων; *Acta Pilati*, pp. 282–3: Κύριέ μου, υἱέ μου, ποῦ τὸ κάλλος ἔδω τῆς μορφῆς σου; *Epitaph. Threnos*, I, 8; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, l. 40: Ποῦ σου τὸ κάλλος ὦ υἱέ, ποῦ σου ἡ ὠραιότης; Λαογραφία, XI (1934), 252, l. 111: Γιόκα μ', ποῦ εἶν' τὰ κάλλη σου, ποῦ εἶν' ἡ ὁμορφία σου; Ephraem, p. 568: Ubi modo forma tua ac decor, mi fili?

—Joseph. Hymn., MPG, CV, 1348A: ὁ ἄδυτος ἥλιος, πῶς ἔδυσ ζύλῳ, Λόγε, τεινόμενος; cf. MMB, nos. 2, 16, 4: Τί ἔδυσ ἐξ ὀφθαλμῶν μου, ὁ ἥλιος τῆς δόξης; *Epitaph. Threnos*, I, 30, II, 25: Δύνεις ὑπὸ γῆν, ἥλιε τῆς δικαιοσύνης· ὅθεν ἡ τεκοῦσα σε λήνη σὲ ταῖς λύπαις ἐκλείπει; Ephraem, p. 568: Sol suum obscuravit lumen.

—MMB, no. 16: ὀρώσαν σε νεκρὸν ἀπνουν ἄλαλον τὴν τῶν ἀπάντων ζωὴν; cf. Manousakas, *Ἀνέκδοτοι στίχοι καὶ νέος αὐτόγραφος κώδιξ τοῦ Ἱ. Πλουσιαδηνοῦ, Ἀθηνᾶ, LXVIII* (1965), p. 54, l. 14: ἀπνουν σὲ βλέπω, τέκνον μου, τὸν ποιητὴν τοῦ κόσμου.

II. *The Epitaphios Threnos*

The *Epitaphios Threnos* is part of the liturgy still chanted on the evening of Good Friday. Little is known about its date and authorship, but according to a recent study, it probably existed in some form from as early as the ninth century, although it was not incorporated into the actual office until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and some parts of it may well be even more recent.¹⁶ Its distinctive character lies not in the content, much of which can be paralleled in the hymns and homilies, but in the lyrical rather than narrative treatment of the material, and in the style. Mary's grief is seen against the background of movement from suffering in the first *stasis* to acclamation and praise in the final *stasis*. The effect is cumulative, and depends, not on the conflict between the human and the divine, nor on characterization, but on the quality of the imagery. At first sight over-exuberant and repetitive, it achieves some internal cohesion by means of antitheses which emphasize various emotive aspects of Christ's descent to Hades. Christ is life, who by dying has put death to death:

- 'Η ζωή, πῶς θνήσκεις; πῶς καὶ τάφῳ οἰκεῖς; γοῦ θανάτου τὸ βασιλεῖον λύεις δέ, καὶ τοῦ ἄδου τοὺς νεκροὺς ἐξανιστᾷς. (I, 2)
— 'Η ζωή ἐν τάφῳ κατετέθης, Χριστέ, καὶ θανάτῳ σου τὸν θάνατον ὤλεσας καὶ ἐπήγασας τῷ κόσμῳ τὴν ζωήν. (I, 6)
— Τῆς ζωῆς τὴν πέτραν ἐν κοιλίᾳ λαβὼν ὁ πάμφαγος ἄδης ἐξήμεσεν ἐξ αἰῶνος οὐς κατέπιε νεκρούς. (I, 23)

Christ is light, or the sun, who by setting has plunged the earth and sky into darkness only to rise more brightly from Hades:

- Ὡς φωτὸς λυχνία νῦν ἡ σὰρξ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑπὸ γῆν ὡς ὑπὸ μόδιον κρύπτεται καὶ διώκει τὸν ἐν ἄδῃ σκοτασμόν. (I, 18)
— Ὡ χαρᾶς ἐκείνης! ὦ πολλῆς ἡδονῆς! ἥσπερ τοὺς ἐν ἄδῃ πεπληρωκας, ἐν πυθμείῳ φῶς ἀστράψας ζοφεροῖς. (I, 48)

16. D. Pallas, *Passion and Bestattung Christi* (Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia II, Munich, 1965), pp. 55ff.; cf. N. Tomadakis, *Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν βυζαντινὴν φιλολογίαν* (3rd ed., Athens, 1965), II, pp. 76–9; E. Pantelakis, *Νέα ἐγκώμια τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου ἐκ συναϊτικοῦ χειρογράφου*, *Θεολογία*, XI (1936), 224–50, 310–29; Th. Xydis, *Ἐγκώμια, Πεπραγμένα τοῦ θ' Βυζαντινολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, III (Thessaloniki, 1957, 277–87). I am indebted to Mr. G. Rakintzakis for several of the above references.

—Ὡ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου, γλυκύτατόν μου τέκνον, πῶς τάφῳ
νῦν καλύπτῃ; (III, 30)

By his sleep in death, Christ will waken the dead from their sleep:

—Ὑπνωσας, Χριστέ, τὸν φυσίζων ὕπνον ἐν τάφῳ καὶ βαρέος
ὕπνου ἐξήγειρας τοῦ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος.
(II, 4)

—Ὑπνωσας μικρὸν καὶ ἐζώωσας τοὺς τεθνεῶτας καὶ
ἐξαναστὰς ἐξανέστησας τοὺς ὑπνοῦντας ἀπ' αἰῶνος, Ἀγαθέ.
(II, 39)

Nature imagery is more abundant, but at the same time more concrete here than elsewhere. Christ's unsurpassed physical beauty and youth, even in death, are expressed through metaphors and similes: he is like a seed of corn sown in the earth, whose fruit will raise the sons of Adam from the dead (I, 29); the life-giving Vine has descended beneath the earth to make abundant the wine of salvation (II, 40). These images give greater immediacy to Mary's plea to all nature—mountains, valleys, and streams—to weep with her at the death of their God (I, 68), and to her cry in the final *stasis* which identifies Christ's death with the loss of spring:

Ὡ γλυκύ μου ἔαρ, γλυκύτατόν μου τέκνον, ποῦ ἔδω σου τὸ
κάλλος; (III, 17)

The new and significant features of the *Epitaphios Threnos*, then, are the lyrical and almost mystical treatment of the theme, and the emphasis upon the figure of the weeping mother within the context of the universal lamentation of man and nature. Although the precise origins of the work are uncertain, it is probable that it evolved over several centuries, absorbing many old and popular associations of the theme which are not reflected to the same extent in the hymns. Because it continues to express feelings and attitudes about the Crucifixion deeply-rooted in the Greek people, it has retained its vitality to this day. Its impact is generally evident during the Holy Week liturgy, performed before the priest leads the procession of the entire

congregation round the parish, and it has also been considerable in modern Greek literary tradition.¹⁷

III. *Learned influence: rhetoric and tragedy*

Some precedent for the freer treatment in the *Epitaphios Threnos* may be found in the homilies, which combine a new element, that of learned rhetoric, with the already established religious tradition. In his homily *In SS. Mariam assistentem cruci*, George of Nikomedeia (ninth century) introduces a long *planctus*, in which Mary wishes she could endure in his stead the pain of death, and begs Christ for a final word of comfort to remember in the future.¹⁸ In another homily, *In dominici corporis sepulturam*, sometimes attributed to Germanos I, patriarch of Constantinople (eighth century), but more probably the work of Germanos II (c. 1175–1240), we find Mary wishing to descend with Christ to Hades.¹⁹ In spite of the numerous motifs and phrases which can be paralleled elsewhere, the language and style belong to Byzantine learned prose rather than to religious poetry, as can be illustrated by the following example:²⁰

—“Εδύς, τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τὸ φῶς; οὐ χρεῖα μοι λοιπὸν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκκλίποντος, κατατήξω τὸ τούτων ἔνυγρον

17. Its tone and imagery have influenced Varnalis' poem, 'H Mάνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, from *Τὸ φῶς ποὺ καίει* (3rd ed., Athens, 1945), although the interpretation of Christ is totally different. The bereaved mother in Ritsos' 'Επιτάφιος (Athens, 1936) mourns her son in terms similar to Mary. The structure and much of the content of the Good Friday liturgy is used by Elytis in his 'Αἶσιον ἐστὶ (Athens, 1960), while in Sikelianos' poem *Στοῦ δσίου Λουκά τὸ Μοναστήρι* (Λυρικὸς Βίος, III, Athens, 1947), the pagan, Christian, and contemporary associations of the theme are deliberately and explicitly fused.

18. *MPG*, C, 1476A–77B (1473D). There is an elaborate piece of rhetoric on what Christ meant by his last words, 'Ἰδοὺ ὁ υἱός σου and 'Ἰδοὺ ἡ μήτηρ σου, partly addressed to his audience, and partly in the form of a direct reply from Christ to Mary.

19. *MPG*, XCVIII, 269B–77B (272B). Cf. Sym. Met., *MPG*, CXIV, 213C (wish for burial with Christ), Georg. Nicomed., *MPG*, C, 1472B (wish to endure pain in his stead).

20. Cf. Eustathios Makrembolites, *De Hysmines et Hysminiae amoribus*, ed. P. le Bas in G. Hirschig, *Erotici Scriptores* (Paris, 1856), X, 381–2: 'Ἦλιον εἶχον τὸν παῖδα, καὶ νῦν τοῦ παιδὸς κρυβέντος, ἀνήλιος ἡ μήτηρ ἐγώ. 'Αστὴρ μοι παῖς ἐκεῖνος περιφανής, ἀλλ' ἀπεκρύβη, καὶ νῦν ἀφεγγής τὴν μητέρα με κατέλιπε. Φῶς ἦν μοι παῖς ἐκεῖνος, ἀλλ' ἀπεσβέσθη, καὶ νῦν ἐν σκότει πορεύομαι.

εἰς τὰ δάκρυα. Καλύπτῃ τῷ μοδίῳ τοῦ τάφου, ὁ ἀνέσπερος
λύχνος οἰκίας τῆς κοσμικῆς; συγκρυβήσομαί σοι καὶ ἡ λυχνία.

MPG, XCVIII, 269C–D

Perhaps the clearest example of rhetorical influence on our theme is to be found in Symeon Metaphrastes' *S. Mariae Planctus* (end of tenth century), where great emphasis is given to the physical beauty of Christ. Mary begins with a series of contrasts between herself and Christ, the past and the present, all traditional to the lament.²¹ She then praises his lifeless limbs one by one—head, forehead, cheeks, mouth, hands, side and feet, and asks what burial laments and funeral hymns are fitting for her son:

—Καὶ γὰρ χεῖρες ἐμαί, καὶ πρὶν βρεφουργηθέντα
ἐξυπηρέτησαν, καὶ νῦν κηδευομένῳ δουλεύουσιν. ὦ πικρῶν
ἐνταφιῶν! . . . Χλιαροῖς ἐλουσάμην σε νάμασιν, καὶ θερμότερος
ἄρτι καταντλῶ σε τοῖς δάκρυσιν . . .

MPG, CXIV, 216B–C

These rhetorical figures have much in common with those fashionable in the learned romances. The narrative framework has been dispensed with altogether.

Our second example of learned influence is the Christian tragedy, *Christos Paschon*. The play has long been the subject of discussion and controversy, and I can only attempt here to summarize some aspects which are relevant to the present study. The question of its date and authorship must still be regarded as uncertain, although scholarly opinion favours the view that it was written in the eleventh or twelfth century, rejecting the attribution of some of the manuscripts and of the *Suda* to Gregory Nazianzen (fourth century).²² Hypotheses on its authorship are almost as numerous as scholarly discussions, and the play has been attributed variously to Apollinarios

21. See Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, pp. 165–77.

22. See A. Doering, *De tragoedia Christiana, quae inscribitur ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΠΑΣΧΩΝ* (Barmen, 1864); K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (2nd ed., Munich, 1897), p. 749; I. Hilberg, *Wiener Studien*, VIII (1886), 282–314; K. Horna, *Hermes*, LXIV (1929), 429–31; F. Dölger, *Die byzantinische Dichtung in der Reinsprache* (Berlin, 1948), p. 16.

(fourth century), Gregory of Antioch (sixth century), John Tzetzes, Theodore Prodromos and Constantine Manasses (twelfth century), while others have defended the authenticity of the traditional attribution to Gregory. Among the latter is Venetia Cottas, who claims that the play is the source of all subsequent Passion Plays, western as well as Greek!²³ A more objective case has been argued forcefully by A. Tuilier, both on general grounds, and on the basis of the manuscript tradition of Euripides which the play reflects; but his omission of any detailed analysis of language, style, and metre will leave many still unconvinced.²⁴

The question of sources is easier to ascertain. Just over half the total number of 2,610 lines have been 'lifted' from ancient tragedies known to us (from seven plays of Euripides, from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Prometheus Bound*, and from Lykophron's *Kassandra*), and there are further borrowings from the Old and New Testaments and from the apocryphal gospels and acts. The play falls into three parts—Passion and Death, Christ at the Tomb, Resurrection—and is characterized by Tuilier as a trilogy. The central figure is Mary, not Christ. The uncompromisingly archaizing form has enabled the author to treat several motifs, found elsewhere in a variety of sources, with a degree of freedom which might otherwise have been unacceptable. For example, the cruel ingratitude of the Jews is referred to in all laments throughout Greek tradition, from Romanos to the modern ballads, but in the *Christos Paschon* Mary denounces and curses Judas in a lengthy speech, based mainly on lines from Euripides (272–346). The only parallel to Mary's curse is in the modern ballads, where she denounces Judas and the Jews, and curses the gipsy smith who forged the nails for the Crucifixion. Similarly with the suicide wish—she repeatedly longs for death as an escape from her own misery and despair, left alone without kinsfolk or friends (371–2, 756–8, 887–903, 1330). Again, the lines are borrowed from Euripides, but it is significant that the suicide wish appears tentatively in the homilies, in the form of a remote hypothesis, more explicitly in one manuscript of the *Acta Pilati*, and persistently in all versions

23. V. Cottas, *Le théâtre à Byzance* (Paris, 1931), pp. 244–9.

24. A. Tuilier, Grégoire de Nazianze: *La Passion de Christ, tragédie* (Sources Chrétiennes 149, Paris, 1969), pp. 11–64.

of the modern ballads.²⁵ Finally, in lines taken from the *Bacchae* and from the apocryphal *Protevangelium Iacobi*, Mary implores Christ to rise from the dead, not for the sake of man's salvation, as in the hymns and homilies, but so that the cruel slanders against her honour should be silenced by the manifestation of his divinity (1547–59).²⁶ The inclusion of this apocryphal theme in the lament is, to my knowledge unique.

The general significance of the play is twofold. First, whatever the date of composition, it is the earliest attempt in Greek to dramatize the events of the Passion, from the news of the final judgement on Christ after the Last Supper to the Resurrection. Whether such a learned presentation ever was or could have been successful on the stage is impossible for us to say. Second, the play includes motifs found also in the hymns, homilies, the *Acta Pilati*, the *threnoi*, and the modern ballads, and in spite of the archaizing language and classical exterior, the treatment of these motifs is closer to popular than to religious tradition. It would be mistaken to argue on the basis of these facts the influence of the *Christos Paschon* on later laments, or on the western Passion Plays. Rather they suggest that the relationship between the religious, learned, and popular traditions of the lament was one of interdependence. If a common link is to be postulated, it should probably be sought in the *Acta Pilati*.

IV. *The Acta Pilati*

The second recension of the Gospel of Nikodemus, known as the *Acta Pilati*, is of crucial importance. It survives in three manuscripts, two of the fifteenth century and one later.²⁷ Several scholars have assumed that the laments in this recension are as

25. *Acta Pilati*, p. 285: χωρίς σοῦ, νιέ μου, τί ἐγὼ γενήσομαι; πῶς ζήσω χωρίς σου; (MSS. A and B); . . . λοιπὸν σὸν σοὶ θανοῦμαι! (MS. C). For her complaint that she has no family (*Christos Paschon*, 756–8), cf. Sym. Met., MPG, CXIV, 213B: ὁ πατήρ μου καὶ ἡ μήτηρ μου ἐγκατέλιπόν με, σὺ δέ με προσελάβου; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, ll. 74–6: οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνει, νιέ μου, ὅλως, οὐκ ἔχω ἄλλον συγγενῆ, πατέρα ἢ μητέρα/ἢ ἀδελφὸν ἢ ἀδελφὴν παραμυθῆσασθαί με; Ephraem p. 568: Non alius mihi superest cognatus pater vel mater, frater aut soror, qui animum mihi reddant.

26. See *Protevangelium Iacobi*, 13–16, ed. Tischendorf, pp. 24–30.

27. See Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apokrypha*, pp. LXXII–LXXIII: Venetus Marcianus class. II, cod. CLI (A), copied at Mt. Sinai, date unknown but probably late; Paris. Nat. 808 (B); Ven. Marc. class. II, cod. LXXXVII (C), origins unknown but both fifteenth century.

early as the fifth century, and that they are the source of all later laments in Greek, including Romanos' *kontakion*.²⁸ Yet none of the laments appears in the earlier recension, the *Gesta Pilati*, which, according to M. R. James, originated in the fourth century, and to which the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Latin versions conform.²⁹ The second recension is generally agreed to be a late and diffuse working-over of the first, and E. Henneke points out that the use of the term *Theotokos* argues a post-Ephesos date, suggesting that it is, in fact, 'much later', with some 'not very skilful additions'.³⁰ Since the three manuscripts diverge considerably in the text of the laments, can we assume that, *in the form in which we have them*, they are much older than the manuscripts themselves, since this type of material was particularly prone to interpolation? This is not to say that there were no laments in the *Acta Pilati* until the fifteenth century, rather that the tradition did not remain static.

The sequence of events is narrated as follows. John, leaving the scene of the Crucifixion, seeks Mary and asks why she has not come to see what is happening to her son, telling her that the Jews have taken him to be crucified. Weeping and in a state of dizziness, she goes with John, together with Martha, Mary Magdalene and Salome. Reaching the crowd of people near the Cross, she asks John which is her son. He points to Christ, with a crown of thorns upon his head and his hands bound. Mary swoons. When she recovers, she utters her first lament, short in MSS. A and B (containing the three familiar motifs: 'Where is your beauty?', 'How can I bear to see you suffer thus?', and 'What have you done to deserve this from the Jews?'), but considerably more diffuse in MS. C, which says she 'rages like a

28. G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIV, XV et XVI siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mt.-Athos* (Paris, 1960), pp. 489ff; N. Livadaras in N. Tomadakis, *Ῥωμανοῦ τοῦ Μελωδοῦ ὕμνοι, ἐκδιδόμενοι ἐκ πατριακῶν κωδίκων* (Athens, 1954), II, p. 154; D. Pallas, *Passion und Bestattung Christi*, p. 52. A. C. Mahr, in his reconstruction of the fragmentary Cypriot Passion Play (c. 1270), actually interpolates the text of the apocryphal laments into the play, where a lament is indicated by the stage instructions, but no text is given; Mahr, *The Cyprus Passion Cycle* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1947), pp. 34, 194, 198, 202.

29. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 94, 115.

30. E. Henneke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (London, 1963), I, pp. 448-9.

lioness'. The Jews push her aside, and Christ is nailed to the Cross. Seeing him, Mary says (in MSS. A and B) 'My son, my son!', at which Christ turns to her and points to John, saying 'Behold thy son!' and to John 'Behold, thy mother!', as in the Gospel of St. John. MS. C has interpolated an extensive lament, containing a series of rhetorical questions (such as 'Where are the promises made to me by Gabriel?'), and ending with the complaint that she has nowhere to go, and wishes to die with Christ. A further lament occurs after Christ has spoken from the Cross, in which Mary first reproaches the disciples for their cowardice (rather more aggressively than she does in the hymns and homilies), then prays to the Cross to bend down so that she can embrace and kiss her son for the last time. This theme also occurs in the homily attributed to Ephraem, in the vernacular *threnoi* and the modern ballads, and in the western *planctus* and Passion Plays.³¹ Again, Mary is pushed aside. Her final lament is spoken later, at the tomb, where she says, as in the hymns and homilies, 'Who shall stay my tears, if not you yourself when you rise on the third day?' (MSS. A and B). MS. C gives the following:

—Εὐχαριστῶ, υἱέ μου, τοῦ ἡλίου σου ὅτι ἀπημαυρώθῃ, καὶ τῆς γῆς ὅτι ἐσχίσθῃ καὶ ἐφοβήθῃ, καὶ αἱ πέτραι [sic] διότι ἐφράγησαν ἰδὼν τὴν ἀνομίαν τῶν ἀμνημῶν Ἰουδαίων.

It would be difficult to prove that all these laments are as old as the fifth century. With the exception of the swoon (also

31. *Acta Pilati*, p. 285: Κλῖνον σταυρέ, ἵνα περιλαβοῦσα τὸν υἱόν μου καταφιλήσω τὸν ἐμὸν υἱόν; cf. Ephraem, pp. 568–9: Tu mihi, jam Crux sanctissima, lignumque benedictum, decumbe: ut dilectissimi filii mei, ac Dei mei plagas exosculer, . . . ut filii mei corpus amplectar; Θρήνος τῆς Θεοτόκου, ll. 84–7: Κλῖνον, σταυρέ, πανάγιε, κλῖνον τὴν κορυφὴν σου, / σταυρὲ παναγιώτατε, ζῶλον εὐλογημένον, / ἵνα φιλήσω τὰς πληγὰς υἱοῦ μου καὶ θεοῦ μου, / ἵνα περιπλακῇ-σωμαι σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μου; Ἀρχεῖον Πόντου, X (1950), 133, l. 44: Σταυρέ μου, κλίσκου χαμελά, σταυρέ μου, κλίσκου κάτω. In western tradition the motif may be traced to Venantius Fortunatus (d. 610), *Hymn to the Holy Cross*, ed. C. Blume and G. M. Drevs, *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, L (Leipzig, 1902), p. 71, no. 66, v. 9: Flecte ramos, arbor alta, / tensa laxa viscera. . . . It also occurs, in a form remarkably close to the Greek examples, in the thirteenth-century *Laus de Passione Iesu de cruce*, cited by S. Sticca, *The Latin Passion Play: its origins and development* (New York, 1970), p. 151. I am grateful to Peter Dronke for his advice on the western material.

common in western medieval tradition and in the modern ballads),³² all the themes can be paralleled elsewhere. The laments, especially those in MS. C, show some stylistic affinities with the homilies and the *Epitaphios Threnos* and some similarities with the *Christos Paschon* and the vernacular *threnoi*, but the sequence and detail of the narrative is strikingly close to the modern ballads, as we shall see. In addition to the evidence provided by the manuscript tradition for extensive interpolation, there are indications in MS. C of linguistic forms demonstrably closer to the medieval vernacular than in either of the other manuscripts.³³ The popular character of the work is also evident in the presentation of the laments within the narrative—almost dramatic—framework: the scene changes swiftly from Mary's house to the crowds around the Cross, then

32. *Acta Pilati*, p. 282: ὀλιγοψύχησε καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐξ ὀπίσω εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἔκειτο ἱκανὴν ὥραν; cf. O. Cremaschi, "Planctus Mariae": Nuovi testi inediti', *Aevum*, XXIX (1955), 432: in terra cecidi, in terra corruui, propter magnitudinem angustie; W. Lipphardt, 'Studien zu den Marienklagen: Marienklagen und germanische Totenklage', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, LVIII (1934), 419. The gesture of swooning in association with lamentation is considered to be medieval in origin by K. Gierden, *Das altfranzösische Alexiuslied der Handschrift L: eine Interpretation unter dem Gesichtspunkt von Trauer und Freude (Untersuchungen zur romanischen Philologie, I (Meisenheim am Glan, 1967))*, pp. 53–4.

33. Morphology: third person plural endings of the present tense in -ουν instead of -ουσι, δίδουν, p. 283, νομίζουν, p. 285. See G. Hadzidakis, *Μεσαιωνικά καὶ Νέα Ἑλληνικά* (Athens, 1905), I, pp. 35–8. Third person plural endings of the aorist in -ασι instead of -αν, προσεφέρασι, p. 283. This phenomenon goes back to the late Hellenistic *koine*. See G. Hadzidakis, *Einleitung in die neugriechische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1892), p. 112. Syntax: use of masculine forms of participle and of certain adjectives for feminine: κλαίων, πάντες, p. 285, θεωρῶν, ἰδών, p. 292. This feature is common in the language of Romanos, and began in the *koine*. See K. Mitsakis, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist* (Munich, 1967), p. 306. Use of genitive instead of dative, and of accusative instead of genitive: εὐχαριστῶ τοῦ ἡλίου, . . . τῆς γῆς, p. 292, μετὰ Ἰωάννην, p. 293. See Mitsakis, p. 140. Lexicology: παραπονεμένη, p. 285: the verb παραπονῶ is medieval, and is not found in classical, NT, or patristic lexica. See D. C. Hesseling and H. Pernot, *Poèmes Prodromiques en grec vulgaire* (Amsterdam, 1910), Index, s.v., and H. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (repr. Graz, 1954), s.v. τὰ φύλλα τῆς καρδίας μου, p. 285: this expression is found in the late medieval *Ἑρωτοπαίγνια* and in Renaissance Cretan texts; see S. Xanthoudidis, *Ἑρωτόκριτος* (Iraklion, 1915), p. 729. These linguistic forms, although impossible to date precisely, are typical of the medieval vernacular. I am indebted to Dr. D. W. Holton for advice on several points.

to the tomb; there is rapid action and dialogue; and Mary's laments have an explicitly ritual character—she swoons, cries out, weeps, tears her face with her nails, and beats her breast. Twice she has to be pushed aside. She is a woman of flesh and blood, not the ethereal creature of the hymns and homilies. Rather than assume a direct influence of the *Acta Pilati* on later vernacular tradition, I should prefer to argue that the text had itself been subject to popular re-handling in the process of transmission.

An interesting parallel to the Virgin's lament in the Greek *Acta Pilati* is a long, lyrical prose lament, preserved in two manuscripts (c. 1450 and 1683), and written in Arabic, in Syriac Garshūni script. A. Mingana suggests that the document is earlier, constituting a further link in the chain of *Acta Pilati*, and probably a translation or close imitation of a Coptic document (surviving only in fragments) on the history of Pontius Pilate.³⁴ The lament is introduced by a long series of rhetorical questions which justify Mary's grief by reference to the Patriarchs: 'The weeping of Jacob, chief of the Patriarchs, has been renewed today, O my beloved; why then should not the Virgin Mary weep over her son, whom she conceived in virginity?' It differs from the Greek *Acta Pilati* both in its elaborately rhetorical form, and in the sequence of events. There is no mention of Mary's swoon, nor of her suicide wish. On the other hand, her complaint that the disciples have deserted Christ receives extensive treatment. The women who bring the news of the imminent Crucifixion to Mary ask her, 'O Mary, what are you doing sitting while your son is being judged and insulted by the high priest of the Jews? . . . O dove of Hannah, what are you doing sitting while your son is being crucified?' This reproach—stronger than John's simple question in the Greek text ('Where were you that you did not come?')—may be compared with Mary Magdalene's outright accusation in a modern ballad from Asia Minor, that Mary has been washing in a silver bath and combing her hair with an ivory comb, while Christ has been seized and is being tortured by the Jews.³⁵ This

34. A. Mingana, 'Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshūni' (Woodbrooke Studies, IV [Cambridge, 1928]), II, pp. 163–93. I owe this reference to Dr. S. P. Brock.

35. *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 225, 48–50.

text does not prove any direct connection between the Arabic and Greek traditions of the Virgin's lament, but it does provide independent evidence for the continued re-handling of apocryphal material in vernacular literature.

V. Vernacular threnoi and Passion Play fragments

The vernacular tradition to which the verse laments of the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine period belong marks a change of direction in Byzantine literature. Old and well-established themes, both religious and secular, are adapted to suit the tastes of a wider audience, while influences both from oral poetry and the west become more apparent. The metre is usually the fifteen-syllable *politikos stichos*, with rhyming couplets introduced from the end of the fifteenth century. The language of our verse laments varies from a vernacular *koine*, with a high proportion of archaisms (due to the influence of the language of the church) to a more consistent use of dialect. Authorship in many cases is hard to determine, but some are identifiable as Cretan and two as Cypriot.³⁶

Probably the earliest of them is one entitled *Θρήνος τῆς υπεραγίας Θεοτόκου εἰς τὴν Σταύρωσιν τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ*, surviving in several manuscripts, and belonging probably to the fifteenth or even to the fourteenth century. Of the two manuscripts on which M. Manousakas bases his edition, one is from Mt. Sinai, in the hand of a Cretan monk named Makarios, and the other is dated 1696.³⁷ The language is consistently archaizing with no trace of dialect. It opens with a short introduction of lines adapted from the hymns (1–6),³⁸ and concludes with an *enkomion* to Mary (112–24), which Manousakas considers to be a later addition. The intervening lament is spoken entirely by Mary. All the themes can be traced back to earlier literature (hymns, *Epitaphios Threnos* and *Acta Pilati*), while some lines have been only slightly adapted from these sources to fit the metre.³⁹ While neither the literary merit

36. Edited and unedited texts are listed by Manousakas, *Mélanges Merlier*, II (1956), 51, n. 1.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 64, n. 2.

38. See above, notes 11 and 15.

39. Address to Christ, 'How can you suffer thus?' (hymns), 7–17; address to Jews, past miracles (Romanos, hymns), 18–28; Christ's lost beauty, nature's suffering (*Epitaph. Threnos*, homilies), 40–9; address to Gabriel (hymns), 50–8;

nor the originality of the poem may be great, several stylistic features, such as the variable 'refrain' (*υιέ μου* and *υιέ μου και θεέ μου*) at metrically significant points in the line, may owe something to the techniques of oral recitation. Certainly the poem has enjoyed long-lasting popularity, if only indirectly: Manousakas has shown that it formed the basis of a longer lament in rhyming couplets, composed in the latter half of the seventeenth century by the Kephallonian poet, Anthimos Diakrousis.⁴⁰ A Cretan manuscript with substantially the same text but without the name of Diakrousis has recently come to light, dated 1855; further, a *threnos*, similar to that of the 1855 manuscript, is sung to this day on Good Friday in several villages of East Crete near Ierapetra. It is performed alongside the modern ballads from written texts, of which thirteen versions survive, representing three main branches of the tradition.⁴¹ Here, then, we have a link between one of the earliest *threnoi*, which incorporates some considerably older material, and modern popular tradition.

Another *threnos* survives in a manuscript copied by the Cretan scholar Ioannes Plousiadenos between the years 1450 and 1467.⁴² It has certain general similarities with the previous text, but it cannot be shown to be based directly upon it. One of its most interesting features is its linguistic variety: although

address to Symeon (hymns), 59–64; lament and address to Christ (homilies, *Christos Paschon, Acta Pilati*), 65–80; invocation to women to weep with her and prayer to Cross to bend (*Acta Pilati*), 81–96; praise of Christ (hymns), 97–111. For a few examples of lines adapted from earlier texts to fit the metre, see above, notes 11, 15, 25 and 31; and for line 42: *ὁ ἥλιος ἐσκότασεν τὸ φῶς καὶ ἠλλοιώθη*, cf. *Epitaph. Threnos*, II, 52: *καὶ ἐσκότασεν ὁ ἥλιος τὸ φῶς* and Ephraem, p. 568: *Sol suum obscuravit lumen, et a se alius factus est*. Our *threnos* shows closer parallels, both in motifs and phrases, to Ephraem's *planctus* than to any other single text.

40. Manousakas, *Mélanges Merlier*, II, pp. 69–73: Diakrousis' version has 246 lines, of which 1–174 are derived from lines 1–111 of the earlier *threnos*, the increase in number being due to the addition of a further line to complete the rhyming couplet. Lines 175–246 are an expansion of the concluding *enkommion* (112–24).

41. See M. Amarioti, 'Η Περισταμένη', *Ἐπετηρίς τῆς Ἑταιρείας Κρητικῶν Σπουδῶν*, II (1939), 313–23, and G. Amargianakis, *Λαϊκὸν στιχιοῦργημα τοῦ Θρήνου τῆς Θεοτόκου εἰς τὴν Σταύρωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Ἐπετηρίς τοῦ Κέντρου Ἑρεῦνης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Λογογραφίας*, XX–XXI (1969), 185–22.

42. M. Manousakas, *Ἀθηνᾶ*, LXVIII (1965), 54–9.

archaisms abound, they are justifiable within the religious context of the poem, and do not detract from the demotic flavour of the whole. There is also a freer use of dialect elements, some of which are identifiable as Cretan.⁴³ The whole *threnos* is spoken by Mary, who begins by lamenting Christ's death and lost beauty in a direct address (1–26), then reminds the Jews of how they have benefited from God's goodness in the past only to reward him with ingratitude now (27–80), and appeals to all nature to demonstrate its anger and sorrow (81–97). Then she turns again to Christ and laments, in a passage where her expression of grief has something of the immediacy and simplicity of Sarah's laments for Isaac in the seventeenth-century play, *The Sacrifice of Abraham*:

ᾠ Ἰησοῦ γλυκύτατε, ὦ Ἰησοῦ νιέ μου,
 πῶς νὰ <σε> θέσω, τέκνον μου, σὺ μνημα νὰ μισσέθω
 ἢ πῶς <ἐγὼ> χωρὶς ἐσὲν σὺ σίτι νὰ γυρίσω,
 πῶς νὰ γυρίσω ἢ ταπεινὴ ζένη καὶ πονεμένη
 ἢ πῶς νὰ ζήσω, τέκνον μου, ἢ παραπονεμένη;
 Λέγω νὰ μὴ σὺ μνημα σου, νὰ 'μαι μ' ἐσὲν ὁμάδι
 καὶ νὰ κατέβω σύψυχη, συζώντανη σὺν Ἀδην,
 νὰ δεῖρω 'κεῖ τὰ στήθη μου εἰς τοὺς προπάτοράς μου . . .
 (98–105)

A new variation on the suicide wish is introduced at this point. Mary desires to go down to Hades alive in order to seek out her forefathers and blame them for what has happened (106–41). Adam and Eve, also Cain, are held responsible through their sin and violence, while Abraham is accused of having created a *typos* agreeing to sacrifice Isaac:

ᾠ Ἀβραάμ, προπάτορ μου, σὺ ἐδειξας τὸν τύπον,
 ὅταν αὐτὸν ἐφόρτωσες τὸν Ἰσαὰκ τὰ ζύλα,
 νὰ πᾶς ἀπάνω σὺ βουνὴν, θυσίαν νὰ τὸν κάμης·
 καὶ ἀφοῦ τὸν πῆγες σὺ βουνὴν κ' ἐθηκες καὶ τὰ ζύλα,
 ἐζήλωσες τὸν Ἰσαὰκ δεμένον χέρια—πόδια,
 ἵνα τὸν σφάζης, Ἀβραάμ, θυσία νὰ τὸν κάμης.
 (116–21)

43. Ibid., pp. 53–4.

She concludes with a long prayer to all Christians to come with her and rejoice in the salvation which the Crucifixion has brought (142–89).

This poem has a freshness and individuality. Different details are used to elaborate familiar motifs. The idea of Mary's live descent to Hades may derive from a combination of sources, from the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*, where she visits the souls of the damned in Hades and intercedes on their behalf, and from the apocryphal *Descensus Christi ad inferos*, which refers to the presence in Hades of the Old Testament patriarchs.⁴⁴ At the same time, it is hard to avoid comparison with the Hades of the modern *moirologia*, which is not clearly distinguished from Paradise, and also with Mary's plea to Christ at the end of some Good Friday ballads to give her the keys of Paradise, so that she can comfort old men who lie in pitch and babies who have forgotten their mothers!⁴⁵

Distinct from these vernacular verse *threnoi* are the short dramatizations of the Passion, such as the Cretan poet Marinós Falieros' *Θρήνος εις τὰ Πάθη καὶ τὴν Σταύρωσιν Χριστοῦ* (sixteenth century), which is a free dramatic adaptation of the Gospel story, with 264 of its 404 lines spoken by Mary.⁴⁶ In another Cretan *Μυστήριο τῶν Παθῶν*, the anonymous poet makes use of an episodic-dramatic form to compress the Gospel story into just over 300 rhyming couplets.⁴⁷ Mary's lament is unfortunately in a missing part of the text, but the scene where Judas betrays Christ to the Jews contains parallels both with western Passion Plays and with the modern ballads:⁴⁸

44. 'Αποκάλυψις τῆς Θεοτόκου, see A. V. Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-byzantina*, I (Moscow, 1893), pp. 133ff. A version in Cretan dialect has been edited by R. M. Dawkins, *Κρητικὴ Ἀποκάλυψις τῆς Θεοτόκου*, *Κρητικὰ Χρονικά*, II (1948), 487–500.

45. *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 257 (Asia Minor).

46. The text is discussed in detail by Manousakas, *Mélanges Merlier*, II, 51–60.

47. M. Manousakas and O. Parlangeli, 'Άγνωστο κρητικὸ Ἑμυστήριον τῶν Παθῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ', *Κρητικὰ Χρονικά*, VIII (1954), 109–19.

48. See, for example, the Montecassino Passion, the earliest extant western Passion Play (second half of the twelfth century), ed. D. M. Inguanez, 'Un dramma della Passione del secolo XII', *Miscellanea Cassinese*, XII (1936), 7–38, lines 7–18, where Judas tells the Jews that Christ will convert the people away from their true faith, and promises to betray him for a suitable reward; and lines 34–45 for Judas' betrayal of Christ by a kiss. For a comparable scene in a

Judas— Ἐλᾶτε νὰ παγαίνωμεν, τίποτες μὴν φοβᾶστε!
 ἐκεῖνον τὸν περιπλεκτῶ καὶ τὸν φιλήσω, πιάστε!
 (to Christ) Χαῖρε, Ῥαμβί, Διδάσκαλε! τοὺτους ὁποῦ σὲ φέρνω
 τριάντα ἀργύρια ἀπάνω σου ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς κερδαίνω.
 Πιάσετε, δέσετε σφικτὰ τοῦτον ὁποῦ σᾶς δίδω,
 ὡς θέλετε τὸν κάμετε, ἐγὼ σᾶς τὸν προδίδω.
 Ἐτοῦτον λέγουσιν Χριστόν, ποῦ πολλὰ σᾶσε χάνει
 τὸ γένος σας καθημερινό, Χριστιανοὺς τοὺς κάμνει.
 Χορτάσετε τὰ χέρια σας ἀπάνω στὸ κορμὶν του,
 ἐπειδὴ ἀτός του ἠθέλησε νὰ χάσῃ τὴν ζωὴν του.
 Christ— Φίλε, καὶ μὲ τὸ φίλημα ἤρθες νὰ μὲ κομπώνῃς;

(39–49)

The question of western influence on these poems is too complex to be discussed here, but the flourishing of Latin and vernacular *planctus* and Passion Plays from the second half of the twelfth century, and throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, must have had some impact on Greek tradition, and may account for the increased popularity of our theme. In the case of the two verse *threnoi* there seems little reason to suppose specific western influence, since so much of their form and content derives from earlier Byzantine material; but the possibility of a more direct western influence on the dramatic poems cannot be excluded. The only precedents in Greek for a dramatization of the Passion are the *Christos Paschon*, and a scenario in learned prose which A. C. Mahr considers to be of Cypriot origin, c. 1270.⁴⁹ His claim that this is the 'first complete Passion Play known to history' cannot, however, be upheld, since the Montecassino Passion is at least a century older. The final scenes are missing, but it deals in full with events from Judas' betrayal to Mary's few lines of vernacular *planctus* at the foot of the Cross.⁵⁰ The Cypriot manuscript provides only the scenario, not the complete text. One detail which suggests a possible link between the Cypriot play and modern folk tradition is the specific mention in the Crucifixion and

modern ballad from Thrace, see *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 250, ll. 40–1, 46; καὶ μὲ τὸ μάτι ἔγνεψε καὶ μὲ τὸ στόμα λέγει, /—Αὐτός εἶναι καὶ πιάστε τον, γλήγορα μὴ σᾶς φύγῃ . . . / Ἀπ' τὰ μαλλιά τὸν πιάσανε, στὰ μάρμαρα τὸν κροῦσαν.

49. Mahr, *The Cyprus Passion Cycle*, introduction.

50. Inguanez, op. cit. See also Sticca, *The Latin Passion Play*, pp. 39–121.

Deposition scenes of the *χαλκεύς* or *κωμοδρόμος*, the vagrant smith who nails Christ to the Cross and later takes him down. But the legendary forging of the nails also occurs in a thirteenth-century French religious poem, *Passion des Jongleurs*, and in a Passion Play, also from France, assigned to the beginning of the fourteenth century, where the smith is struck with leprosy, and his wife, who is forced to perform the task, curses Jesus.⁵¹ All we can say is that this motif, common to Greek and to western medieval tradition, has found its way into a considerable number of the modern ballads. In my opinion, neither the *Christos Paschon* nor the Cypriot scenario provides sufficient proof that dramatic presentations of the Passion had any real basis in Greek popular tradition before they became widespread in the west. The paucity of Greek material, together with the similarities between the western and the sixteenth-century Cretan plays, suggests that the Passion Play was essentially a western phenomenon.

On the other hand, the main features of the Virgin's lament were well established in Greek before the twelfth century, and this tradition was clearly familiar to the vernacular poets of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Their chief contribution lay in the freer handling of material, and above all in the popularization of the language. There is some individuality, if not originality, of treatment, and several indications of a connection with the techniques of oral transmission and with certain motifs in the modern folk ballads.

VI. *Modern folk tradition*

It would be impossible here to give an exhaustive analysis of the numerous and diverse laments of the Virgin which have survived in Greek folk tradition. I shall discuss certain features found in a selection of texts, which will indicate something of the range and scope of the material, and how it is related to the Byzantine material already discussed.

The 'Songs of Good Friday', as they are frequently known, have been recorded from most parts of the Greek-speaking world, from Calabria in S. Italy, from the Dodecanese, Crete,

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–5. Mahr discusses the relation of this scene to iconographical representations of the Crucifixion in the fifteenth century, pp. 63ff. and Chapter V.

Cyprus, Asia Minor, and the Pontos, as well as from mainland Greece.⁵² All have certain fundamental characteristics in common. They are ritual, occasional songs, performed not for entertainment at any time of the year, but exclusively during Holy Week, usually by the women as they decorate the *Epitaphios* with flowers, or keep vigil over it during the night. In form and structure they are closer to the *paraloges* than to the *moirologia*, since they combine narrative and dramatic with lyrical elements. They are also collective rather than individual songs, forming part of a religious ceremony which involves the whole parish. Unlike many other types of folk-song, they have been exposed to the influence of a non-oral tradition—specifically, to the influence of Holy Week hymns and Gospel readings, and of the *Epitaphios Threnos*.

Most versions begin with a general statement of lamentation. Some proceed to relate the events preceding the Crucifixion—the Last Supper (Rhodes, Pontos), Pilate's judgement, and Judas' betrayal of Christ to the Jews (Thrace, Asia Minor). News of the flagellation, torture, and imminent Crucifixion is taken to Mary, either by John (Kastellorizo), or more usually by Mary Magdalene. In one version from Asia Minor, Christ asks bitterly, 'Will no one go and tell my mother? Only Mary Magdalene will go!' (Asia Minor [B]). Usually, Mary is at home praying (Asia Minor [A], Rhodes, Chios, Thrace), but sometimes she is found in her bath (Asia Minor [B], Pontos), and is suitably reproached. On hearing the news, Mary swoons, and has to be revived with quantities of water (all versions). She sets off with the other women, calling on the way at the house of the gipsy nail-maker who forged the nails for the Cross (Cyprus [A] and [B], Thrace, Pontos, Kastellorizo, Asia Minor [A] and [B]), and cursing him to eternal vagrancy (Kastellorizo, Thrace, Asia Minor [B]). The gipsy was asked for three nails, but decided to

52. A bibliography is given by E. Stamatouli in *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 253. Details of the versions I have referred to in the text are as follows: Rhodes—S. Baud-Bovy, *Chansons du Dodécanèse* (Athens, 1935), I, pp. 47–58; Chios—K. Kanellakis, *Χιακά Ἀνάλεκτα* (Athens, 1890), pp. 47–58; Kastellorizo—*Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, IV (1892), 722 β—δ; Thrace—*Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 249–53; Pontos—*Ἀρχαῖον Πόντου*, XV (1950), 131–2; Asia Minor [A]—*Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά*, IV (1948), 215–17; Asia Minor [B]—*Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 254–7; Cyprus [A]—Sakellarios, *Τὰ Κυπριακά* (Athens, 1890–1), II, pp. 84–8; Cyprus [B]—*Λαογραφία*, XXI (1963–4), 422–3.

make five instead (all versions)—two for the hands, two for the feet, and the bitterest of all for the heart. Reaching the scene of the Crucifixion, Mary is bewildered by the crowds, as in the *Acta Pilati*, recognizing only John. She asks him which is her son, and he points to Christ, naked and blood-stained. She swoons again, and is revived as before. She then turns to Christ, who by this time is on the Cross, and laments. In a version from Cyprus which is probably old, she introduces many themes and phrases which are familiar from Byzantine tradition.⁵³ Not all versions give such an extensive lament, but in most, she laments first his lost beauty:⁵⁴

Γιόκα μου, ποῦ 'ν' τὰ κάλλια σου καὶ ποῦ 'ν' ἡ ὁμορφιά σου;
(Asia Minor [B] 93)

She desires to kiss her son and wipe the blood from his wounds, asking him (Thrace) or the Cross (Pontos) to bend down. Then she expresses her loneliness and despair, without family or friends, or because, unlike other mothers, she has not and never will have another child (Thrace). She determines to kill herself (all versions), by stabbing, hanging, drowning, or by jumping over a cliff. She begs Christ for one final word of comfort, and, in a version from Chios which is remarkably faithful to the Gospel story, he replies:

—*Πάρε Γιάννη, τὴ μάννα σου καί, μάννα μου, τὸν υἱόν σου*
(Chios, no. 74)

In other versions he tells her not to weep, saying that if she gives way to despair, there can be no salvation for the rest of mankind. She must go home to prepare the rusk and wine for the *paregoria* (funeral feast). Most versions end at this point, but one continues with an account of how Joseph of Arimathaea goes with Mary (who swoons for the tenth time!) to the house of

53. Cyprus [A], ll. 7–100.

54. A similar formula is found in versions from Cyprus, Thrace, Rhodes, Pontos, and Asia Minor [A]. Cf. *Τὸ τραγούδι τοῦ νεκροῦ ἀδερφοῦ*, N. Politis, *Ἐκλογαὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τραγούδια τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ λαοῦ* (Athens, 1914), no. 92, l. 65: *Πέες μου, ποῦ εἶναι τὰ κάλλη σου καὶ ποῦ εἶναι ἡ λεβεντιά σου*. There is no reason to suppose the dependence of one song upon the other.

Pilate to obtain permission for the burial of Christ's body, and concludes with the burial scene, a further lament, and the *paregoria* at Mary's house (Cyprus [A]).

The fullest versions are those recorded from Asia Minor, the Pontos, Cyprus, Thrace, and Chios. Some, notably from parts of the Dodecanese, are considerably curtailed, containing only the opening line *Σήμερα μαῦρος οὐρανός, σήμερα μαύρη μέρα*, and a few of the motifs summarized above. The episodic-dramatic structure of the longer ballads has given way to a more lyrical treatment.

In what ways do the modern ballads differ from the Byzantine laments, and how far can the differences be explained in terms of oral variation? In a Thracian version, when Judas and the Jews surprise Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, they are invited by him to sit and dine at silver tables, and to drink from silver goblets, but they refuse, saying they have come out of friendship, not to eat or drink. The episode recalls the songs of the Akritic cycle about Digenis and Charos, where Charos refuses a similar invitation from Digenis.⁵⁵ The dramatic effect is, perhaps, deliberate, and the inclusion of this motif here may have been influenced by the context of the Last Supper, which was, according to some versions, the occasion of Christ's betrayal and seizure (Rhodes, Pontos). Second, the versions which describe Mary as in her bath when the news is brought may depart from the scriptures, but they are fully in accordance with the ballad-singer's handling of events, where bad news is brought last to the person most closely concerned, who, quite unsuspecting, is inappropriately occupied.⁵⁶ Third, the confusion in most versions between John the Evangelist and John the Baptist is another case of the oral poet re-handling events, not according to historical truth, but according to what is familiar to himself and his audience.

Some details, however, are less easily explained simply in terms of oral variation, or of the accretion of motifs from other folk songs. In the Thracian version, Christ attempts to avoid

55. *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 250, ll. 33–8, cf. Politis, op. cit., p. 259, no. 4, ll. 5–12.

56. See Politis, op. cit., no. 70, ll. 11–12: *Ἐσεῖς πρῶτε καὶ πίνετε καὶ λιανοτραγουδάτε, καὶ πίσω σας κουρσεύουνε Σαρακηνοὶ κουρσάροι* (Akritic), and no. 53, ll. 8–14 (Klefitic).

capture, after he has been betrayed by Judas, by means of a strange metamorphosis, which makes some see him as an old man and some as an infant. This detail can be paralleled in a local folk tradition, where Christ escapes his pursuers on Maundy Thursday by turning into a small child and hiding in the basket of a passing Arab girl; and it belongs to a widespread popular tradition that Christ had magic powers.⁵⁷ Further, three versions refer to the presence of the curious ‘Saint Kale’, either as one of the women who accompanies Mary to the scene of the Crucifixion (Kastellorizo), or as her first cousin, who passes by when Mary is preparing the *paregoria* and calls out:

—Ποῖδς εἶδε γιὸ εἰς τὸ σταυρὸ καὶ μάνα στὸ τραπέζι;
(Asia Minor [A], 94)

This gratuitous abuse provokes from Mary a curse that this ‘saint’ should possess a church out in the oceans, not among men, where neither priest nor deacon can take the liturgy. ‘Saint Kale’ is, in fact, none other than ‘Kyra Kale’ or ‘Kyra Kalo’ of Greek folklore—a figure of pagan origin, who possesses magic and sometimes evil powers, and, as leader of the Nereids, is associated with mountains and sea.⁵⁸ Her presence in the Good Friday ballads should be seen not merely as an accretion, but, as I have argued elsewhere, as an indication of how certain deeply-rooted pagan associations have become incorporated with the tradition of the Virgin’s lament.⁵⁹ Finally, there is the detail of Mary trying to reach Christ and finding the doors locked and the windows barred, which is found in several versions but in different contexts: at the house of Pilate (Chios), *στοῦ λησιτῆ* (Barabbas?—Thrace), or even *στοῦ στολισιτῆ*, presumably a linguistic corruption of *λησιτῆς* (Asia Minor [B]). If, as K. Romaios has suggested,⁶⁰ the line has crept in from the well-known *Τραγούδι τοῦ νεκροῦ ἀδερφοῦ*, where Arete finds the doors and windows of her mother’s house bolted and barred

57. See *Λαογραφία*, XI (1934), 250–1, n. 2.

58. See K. Romaios, *Τὸ Μοιρολόγι τῆς Παναγίας*, *Ἀρχεῖον Πόντου*, XIX (1954), 197–214; Politis, *Λαογραφία*, I (1909), 350, and J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1909), p. 164.

59. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, pp. 75–6, 78–82.

60. Romaios, *op. cit.*, 216.

after she has been brought home by the *revenant* of her brother Kostantis, how do we explain its presence in songs from different regions, and in different contexts? When Mary reaches Christ, he is apparently at Golgotha, therefore the mention of doors is inappropriate. There seems to be a confused memory of Jesus' trial and subsequent torture in the Judgement Hall: according to one tradition preserved in medieval Latin *planctus*, Mary, hearing of Christ's capture, goes with the other women to the Temple where he is being tortured, and, finding the doors closed, laments outside in an all-night vigil.⁶¹ There can be no question of any direct connection, but it is conceivable that a similar tradition was known in Greece and survived in garbled form in the folk songs. In any case, locked doors and barred windows are common obstacles to ballad heroes and heroines, and there is no need to postulate the influence of a particular ballad.

More fundamental is the divergence from Byzantine tradition in the interpretation of the Crucifixion. The folk ballads scarcely mention the Descent to Hades, or the Resurrection, emphasizing instead Mary's preparation of the *paregoria*. The ritual feast for the dead, which is of pagan origin, is still performed today by the bereaved family; but here, it has been invested with a new significance, since Mary will prepare the meal for all to share, thereby uniting those divided by death:

—Πάνε, μητέρα μ', στὸ καλὸ καὶ στὴν καλὴ τὴν ὥρα,
βάλε κρασί μέσ' τὸ γυαλί κι ἀφράτο παξιμάδι,
κάτσε, μάνα, στὴν τράπεζα κι ἔπαρε τρεῖς βοῦκες,
καὶ κάνε τὴν παρηγοριά, τὴν εὖρ' ὁ κόσμος ὅλος,
νὰ τό 'βρ' ἢ μάν' ἀπ' τὸ παιδί καὶ τὸ παιδί ἀπ' τὴν μάνα,
νὰ τό 'βρη καὶ τ' ἀντρόγυνο, τὸ πολυαγαπημένο.
Σάββατο νὰ μὲ καρτερῇς ἡ ὥρα ἐξ τῆς νύκτας.
Ὅταν διαβάζουν οἱ ἐκκλησιῆς καὶ ψάλλουν οἱ παπάδες,
θ' ἀνεσταθῶ, θὰ πεταχτῶ, θὰ 'λθῶ στὴν τράπεζά σου.
Τότε, κερά μου Παναγιά, νὰ 'χης χαρὲς μεγάλες.

(Thrace, 122–31)

61. Cremaschi, *Aevum*, XXIX (1955), 425: cumque pervenissem usque ad templum,/inveni portas clausas,/et intrare non potui;/stabam ergo foris plorans,/et eiulans,/in amaritudine cordis, cf. p. 443.

The modern ballads share with the Byzantine material a sufficient number of common elements to establish that they belong, ultimately, to the same tradition. At the same time, events and situations have been freely re-handled, not according to any written text, but according to the principles and techniques of oral poetry, the three essential ingredients of which are variation, selection, and continuity.⁶² The human aspect and dramatic potential of the theme have been exploited to the full, to the exclusion of theological or mystical elements. Thus, Mary addresses Christ not as 'my son and God', as in the Byzantine laments, but simply as 'my son', and Christ himself is sometimes credited with powers more magic than divine. The Greek tradition of the Virgin's lament, if seen in its entirety, shows not the predomination of the 'new Christian ethos over the older, pagan elements', as de Martino argued, but the creative absorption of a religious story into oral tradition.

University of Birmingham

62. See M. Karpeles, 'Definition of Folk Music', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, VII (1955), 6, cf. 23.